

It's Just a Job

by

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ISBN 978-1476306124

Published by Lazo Consumer Products, LLC. At Smashwords
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P.O. BOX #690471

Charlotte, NC 28227



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IT'S JUST A JOB

I landed, roughly about four kilometers from the target. Although this is supposed to be an easy job, I don't like taking any unnecessary chances—I bring all my gear with me. From here on, I'm going to walk. The place is supposed to be abandoned, but I prefer to be somewhat cautious.

My jobs are usually just taking pictures, from a safe distance, of places that are not supposed to exist—top secret places. This job is slightly different, and I did have to think about it before I accepted it. I'm to infiltrate this place. Yes, I know it's stupid to deviate from an established pattern, but the money is pretty good and the place, I'm told, is abandoned. I'm filming this one, also. Charley, my contact, my agent if you will, got me one of those fancy new shoulder cameras, the ones that float under their own power and record everything you see. I don't get to keep it, but it's pretty nifty.

Oh, yes, before I forget, I just bought myself a PR 999 rapid repeater. There are only fifteen of them in the world—they are simply too expensive to make for a mass market. Too bad, because it really is quite an amazing weapon. In shape it is like a pistol but uses the same Pulse Repetition Technology as the big ships. Here's the best part, it recharges itself and fires up to 300 rounds per charge. And you don't have to wait for it to recharge either as switching batteries is very fast and easy. Of course, I probably won't have to use it, but it is nice to have all that extra firepower available.

What I have so far is this: contact was lost with the target—some sort of research facility—about three weeks ago; an air surveillance unit confirmed the place was deserted eight days ago; and now I've been hired to find out what happened. That's pretty much it. In case you're wondering why they didn't send the authorities to investigate, this place is not supposed to exist.

I march at a good pace and cover the four kilometers in about forty minutes. I reach the target from the west and take cover behind some rocks and position my scope, beginning preliminary scouting. This is weird. My report states the team operating this facility came in five vehicles; through my scope, I'm seeing five vehicles: three huge transports and two smaller vehicles. If the team abandoned the facility, why didn't they take the vehicles? It's a long walk to civilization from here, and white coat research types don't strike me as being up for an 80 kilometer hike. I scan around the entire perimeter looking for bodies; I don't find any. A scenario forms in my mind: maybe these people were kidnapped. I pull out my weapon and slowly make my way to the facility.

My employers either didn't know or chose not to tell me what this facility was for. For all I know, it could be some sort of bio-lab. I have brought with me an air filtration breathing device and a bio-suit. I don't like taking chances.

The facility is two buildings connected by a bridge. The building to my right is a rectangle of metal and glass, three stories tall. Its one striking feature is that it only has windows on the top floor. The other building, the one to my left, looks like a botched boob job, or half an egg. It's taller than the first building, about five stories, though I'm having to measure by sight because it doesn't have any windows. Both buildings are painted a dark green. The bridge connecting the buildings is transparent and enclosed.

Since I can't just stand around taking pictures from the outside, I look for an entrance. Of course, I'm being very cautious because of my natural paranoia. Even though I doubt there's anyone in there, I don't just want to barge in. That type of hubris gets people killed.

I walk around the facility, doing another perimeter check. It's clear that no one has been here for at least a couple of weeks. The vehicles are just gathering dust.

The camera resting on my shoulder, I switch it on. It buzzes to life and floats above me. The camera follows the movement of my head, recording everything I see.

There are two entrances: one on the boob building and one on the rectangle building. The bigger building seems to me the best place to start. It only has one way in and one way out: the front door. Most buildings have multiple emergency exits; this one does not. I wonder if I'm going to find a bunch of dead bodies inside. Maybe they had an accident—not a fire because the buildings look undamaged from the outside but some sort of chemical spill, perhaps.

I expect the door to be locked but try it anyway. It opens without difficulty. The shoulder camera fires a beam of light, and I step inside. There's a lot of blood on the walls, and I think I see a severed arm. I swing my PR 90 from side to side, trying to find a target. It's not so much that I'm scared as startled...who am I kidding? Of course, I'm scared. This simple job just got complicated.

Because of my breather, I can't smell anything; but with all the blood splattered everywhere, I imagine it's quite rancid. I pull out a poison test kit from my gear bag on my right hip and test the air for poisons. The cylinder tester tells me that the air is far from fresh or even safe; however, it does not detect any poisons.

I try to record everything I can since I am being paid to get information. There's a wall in front of me, and the entrance door is behind me; apparently, I am standing in a hallway that goes both left and right. At the end of the left side of the hallway is a stairway that goes down. The one to the right goes up.

I inspect the severed arm; it's a male arm, and it has tiny maggots squirming all over it. I take the stairway on the right and go up.

I reach the second floor. There's a sliding door requiring a code to open. All the codes of the facility have been supplied to me in a P.I.C.—Personal Information Console. I punch in the code, and the door slides open. Good, the building still has power.

I enter a large area with many rooms. Into every room I enter, trying hard to be thorough and recording everything. There is nothing to find in this floor; it seems to be nothing more than a sleeping area. I head for the next floor.

The third floor is where the ugliness starts. I punch in the code; the door slides open, and I walk into a scene that gives me a start. I was not expecting this. There are dead bodies scattered all over. I count eight.

This floor is as large as the previous one, but the rooms are much larger, and fewer, and the doors are labeled. I find a room with a plaque reading 'Project Manager' on its door. I go in. It's a nice room, almost fancy considering the locale. Up ahead is a computer; I use the P.I.C. to download all its files. When I'm done, I head out and examine the other rooms.

LAB is printed on the door of a large room. I go in. In the center of the room is a large table bolted to the floor. To the left are a bunch of cabinets and drawers. Smashed and broken equipment lies on the floor.

To my right are four small examination tables. Near them, towards a door labeled 'Containment Room,' were three badly mutilated bodies. One of the bodies is lying face down, and I can see its spine sticking out of the lower back. Whatever killed these people did so hard and fast.

I'm sweating heavily, and it's not because of the heat. Needle pricks dance all over my body; I'm nervous. Opening the door slowly, gun at the ready, I enter the 'Containment Room.' All I find are broken cages, about four feet tall and twice as wide. There are six of them, and they seem to have been broken from the inside. Something got out.

Quite frankly, I'm scared and think I should leave; however, I have to cross the bridge and get to the other building if I want to get paid. I don't want to.

I find the bridge and begin crossing it. After having walked about twenty feet, I encounter something that truly shocks me. It's a dead body, but it's not human. The creature is a strange thing. It is roughly about four feet tall, reptilian and somewhat human in body shape, with a face a mixture of a turtle and a cat. At the end of its arms it had what appeared to be hands but with only three long fingers. Those fingers were metallic and very sharp. I keep walking, but by this time I'm really thinking about calling it quits. I figure I can stop one of these things with a single shot from my PR 999, but if they're fast and silent, I'm in trouble.

At the end of the bridge, I find two dead guards. Their heads are missing. I walk into a large open area, almost like a warehouse. The place is a mess. It is full of worker robots, the dumb-bots that look like little tractors. Some of the robots have been attacked, and they lie on their sides, broken. However, not all of the robots were attacked. I wonder if that hints at intelligence. Did these weird creatures come to realize that the robots were not a threat to them?

I search the room, recording everything. There's an elevator ahead. Should I take it? I'm not too crazy about the idea, but I call the elevator anyways. Sometimes I suspect that stupidity,

greed and bravery are travelling companions. Wisdom tells me I should get the hell out of this place, now. But I got a job to do and I need to get paid.

The elevator doors open. I keep my gun pointed, at the ready. There are six heads on the floor of the elevator, arranged in a circle. That's almost enough for me. It's like Arizona again; remember Arizona? This feels like the same. I can hear everything. My breathing sounds to me like a tornado and my heart like drums. I'm on the third floor. I can go down to either the second or first floor. I decide I'm going all the way down to the first floor as I haven't seen enough of the rectangle building.

The elevator doors open. Before me is a battle zone. There are at least ten dead people and six of those creatures. Again, I meticulously record everything, making careful note of how many empty shells lie on the floor. There are an awful amount of shells, making me think that people here were panicking. I can't say what this floor was supposed to be; all I see are cubicles and computers, all destroyed. There are bullet holes on the walls, ceiling, and on the floor.

Some of the bodies have been partially eaten. I think I've seen enough to get paid. I find the exit.

It's getting dark, and the prospect of a four kilometer hike with those creatures possibly out there does not appeal to me. I still haven't checked the downstairs section of the first building, and I won't. What's the point? I'm being paid to find out what happened, and I think I've done that. As I figure it, these people were doing genetic experiments, and they lost control.

I hear hissing and clicking sounds in the distance—time to go.

I make for the vehicles. My approach is very cautious, and I look under, behind, over and inside the vehicles before selecting one. Luck is with me: none of the vehicles are coded. For my purpose, I do not need one of the bigger ones; I select one of the smaller vehicles, activate it, and lift off the ground. I head for my ship.

Well, I'm taking off now. This has most definitely been an interesting job, and I don't mind telling you that I am still a bit freaked out by it. I have no idea what those things were or where they've gone to. I guess that's not my problem. I've done my job—which is all that can be expected from me. I'll see you soon.

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THE END

From The Author

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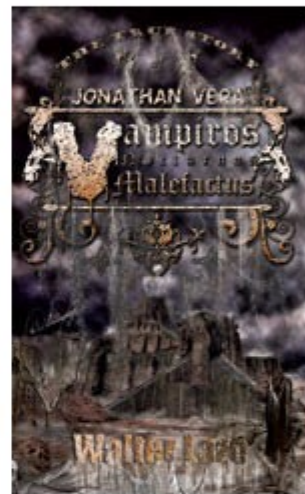
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